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AUTHOR Imel, Susan
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ABSTRACT

The literature base on workplace literacy is continuing to develop at an unprecedented pace. As of March 1995, the ERIC database contained over 900 items indexed with the term "workplace literacy." Of those publications, nearly 400 (44%) were added since 1992. The following trends have been observed in the workplace literacy literature since 1992: the literature related to workplace literacy is continuing to expand; the literature is reflecting a movement toward a more participatory or collaborative approach to workplace literacy; a research base on workplace literacy is emerging; resources on staff development and teacher training are becoming available; and materials on curriculum development and approaches are continuing to expand. (An annotated list of 22 print resources dealing with workplace literacy is included.) (MN)

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Workplace Literacy: Trends in the Literature Trends and Issues Alerts

Susan Imel

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS

by Susan Imel

1995

Workplace Literacy: Trends in the Literature

The literature base on workplace literacy continues to develop at an unprecedented pace. As of March 1995, the ERIC database contained over 900 items indexed with the term "workplace literacy." Nearly 400 of these (or 44 percent) were added since 1992. Furthermore, unlike other areas of adult education, the database is still composed primarily of "fugitive" documents, that is, unpublished materials such as research studies, project reports, and conference papers. Although its fugitive nature makes staying current with the workplace literacy resources somewhat challenging, the literature does reflect healthy developments in the field of workplace literacy. Trends observed in the literature and resources produced since the publication of Imel and Kerka's guide (1992) include the following:

- **Literature related to workplace literacy program development continues to expand.** Although some publications (e.g., Judge 1993; Waugh 1992) focus on the entire program development process, specific aspects of workplace program design and development are also described in the literature. Two areas that have received a great deal of attention are evaluation (e.g., Jurmo 1993; Mrowicki and Conrath 1994; Sperazi and Jurmo 1994) and assessment (Askov 1993; Dyer 1993).
- **The literature reflects a movement toward a more participatory or collaborative approach to workplace literacy.** The importance of involving workers in the design and development of programs is demonstrated in such publications as Perin (1994) and Freeling (1993). Other publications (e.g., Jurmo 1994; Waugh 1992) discuss collaborative program development approaches involving a number of stakeholders.
- **A research base on workplace literacy is emerging.** A number of recent research studies have investigated various aspects of workplace literacy including workplace literacy in a high performance workplace (Hart-Landsberg and Reder 1993), the relationship between socialization and retention (Vann and Hinton 1994), a meta-analysis of military workplace literacy programs (Sticht 1995), and workplace literacy in small and medium-sized firms (Hollenbeck 1993). In addition to these studies, a large body of evaluation reports of National Workplace Literacy Program (NWLP) projects have been entered into the ERIC database.
- **Resources on staff development and teacher training are becoming available.** Several publications are available that address the area of staff development and/or teacher training. Three reports (Massachusetts Department of Education 1993a,b,c) document staff development efforts conducted by the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative. Another set of materials (Center on Education for Training and Employment forthcoming) is intended to prepare instructors for functional context programs that employ a problem-solving, critical thinking, metacognitive approach.
- **Materials on curriculum development and instructional approaches continue to expand.** A recent development in the workplace literacy resource base is the emergence of materials about the curriculum development process or instructional approaches (e.g, Johnson 1993; Lowry and Sterling 1992; McBride, Engel, and Caverly 1992). The ERIC database also contains many examples of specific curricula (e.g., Leidia et al. 1993), most of which were developed in conjunction with NWLP projects.

Resources

Alamprese, J. A., and Kay, A. ***Literacy on the Cafeteria Line: Evaluation of the Skills Enhancement Training Program***. Washington, DC: Cosmos Corporation, 1993. (ED 368 933)

External evaluation report of the Skills Enhancement Training (SET) project, funded by the NWLP.

Askov, E. V. "Approaches to Assessment in Workplace Literacy Programs: Meeting the Needs of All the Clients." ***Journal of Reading*** 36, no. 7 (April 1993): 550-554.

Maintains that assessment in workplace literacy programs must meet the unique needs of learners, unions, management, and literacy providers. Identifies those needs and suggests ways of addressing them.

Center on Education and Training for Employment. ***Workplace Literacy Training Materials: The Context***. Columbus: CETE, The Ohio State University, forthcoming.

Contains three self-instructional packets that focus on the context in terms of the workplace, the learner, and the instructor.

Dyer, G. E. ***Alternative Assessment Methodologies for Workplace Education Programs***. Madison: Wisconsin State Board of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education; Wisconsin Technical College System; Center on Education and Work, University of Wisconsin, 1993. (ED 369 976)

Reports on the results of a study that examined the assessment instruments and techniques currently being used by companies participating in the Wisconsin Workplace Partnership Training program. The most popular were standardized tests; participatory assessment techniques were not generally used.

Freeling, M. ***Becoming Master Learners in the Workplace: Workforce Development through Learning Initiative Teams***. Groveport, OH: Eastland Vocational Schools, 1993. (ED 359 340)

A manual for training an inhouse steering committee to design and implement a comprehensive, ongoing, worker-driven, workplace learning program that will enable employees to participate more actively in quality improvement efforts.

Hart-Landsberg, S., and Reder, S. ***Teamwork and Literacy: Learning from a Skills-Poor Position***. Philadelphia, PA: National Center on Adult Literacy, 1993. (ED 364 747)

Reports on the results of a study that examined the roles of literacy and teamwork in an automotive parts manufacturing company that was restructuring to implement a "high-performance" model of team organization, worker responsibility for quality control, and a pay-for-knowledge compensation system. Although the high-performance model stimulated innovative teaching approaches, most of the approaches proved inadequate to enable the less literate and educated workers to overcome their poor position and improve their literacy skills.

Hollenbeck, K. ***Classrooms in the Workplace: A Study of Workplace Literacy Programs in Small and Medium-Sized Firms***. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1993. (ED 365 843)

One of only a few pieces to consider the topic of workplace literacy from an economic perspective, this monograph reports on workplace literacy programs in small and medium-sized firms in Michigan. Contains insightful policy recommendations.

Imel, S., and Kerka, S. ***Workplace Literacy: A Guide to the Literature and Resources. Information Series No. 352***. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, The Ohio State University, 1992. (ED 354 388)

This guide to literature on workplace literacy includes information on trends and issues, tips on locating and selecting resources, an annotated bibliography of recent resources organized by a framework for classifying the literature, and descriptions of selected workplace literacy programs that illustrate various aspects of program development.

Johnson, H. J. ***Curriculum Development in Selected Workplace Literacy Programs of the Consortium for Worker Education. Evaluation Study***. New York, NY: Institute for Research and Development in Occupational Education, City University of New York, 1993. (ED 367 911)

Describes, discusses, and evaluates a workplace curriculum process, in which teachers were actively involved in both constructing and teaching curricula. Explored the teacher's process in creating a workplace-based literacy curriculum, comparing it to other development approaches.

Judge, D. R., comp. ***Building Effective Workplace Literacy and Education Programs. Lessons from Project ELI. A Partnership Effort Dedicated to Upgrading Millworkers' Skills for the Future***. Helena: Montana State AFL-CIO, 1993. (ED 369 904)

Based on the success of Project ELI (Education, Labor, and Industry), this guide is designed to assist unions, companies, and educational providers in analyzing the educational needs of workers and employers and in developing effective workplace literacy and workplace education programs to meet those needs. Includes a section on developing worker-centered curriculum for both specific and basic skills.

Jurmo, P. ***Re-Thinking How to Plan and Evaluate Workplace Education Programs: Innovations in New York State***. Jersey City, NJ: Literacy Partnerships, 1993. (ED 362 643)

Reports on the results of state-funded workplace education programs in New York state to identify ways of improving program planning and evaluation methods. Identifies possible future actions in the areas of staff development, collaborative site-level planning and evaluation, and collaborative statewide policy development.

Jurmo, P. ***Workplace Education: Stakeholders' Expectations, Practitioners' Responses, and the Role Evaluation Might Play***. East Brunswick, NJ: Literacy Partnerships, 1994. (ED 372 282)

Funded by the National Institute for Literacy, this report focuses on the question of how to evaluate workplace education programs. Its five chapters cover purposes and program models for workplace education programs, three current scenarios for evaluation, what a good evaluation consists of, collaborative approaches, and steps stakeholders can take to support new developments.

Leidia, J. et al. ***The Competitive Edge: Sharpening Your Skills in the Workplace***. Austin: Extension Instruction and Materials Center, University of Texas, 1993. Available from EIMC, P.O. Box 7218, University of Texas at Austin, TX 78713-7218; set of five, $52.00. Series includes Mathematics: Student Edition and Instructors' Guide (ED 356 431-432), Communications: Student Edition and Instructors' Guide (ED 356 429-430); and Administrator's Guide (by Elaine Shelton). (ED 356 428)

Together these materials cover the administrative and instructional aspects of organizing and conducting a workplace literacy program. Communications series emphasizes problem solving and decision making; mathematics program is a refresher course that uses a functional workplace context.

Lowry, B., and Sterling, D. ***Beyond Reading and Writing: A Workplace Curriculum Report***. Quincy: Massachusetts Department of Education, 1992. (ED 355 390)

This evaluation of an 18-month workplace education program at 2 health care sites showed that the curriculum designed could be adapted for other workplace education programs.

McBride, P. G.; Engel, J. C.; and Caverly, D. C. ***Creating Custodial Classes: An Instructional Program Guide for Custodial Workers***. San Marcos: Workforce Instructional Network, Center for Initiatives in Education, Southwest Texas State University, 1992. (ED 353 378)

One of a series of instructional guides developed by WIN, this publication presents a 4-part instructional model containing the following four components: an initiating event; large-group modeling of a learning strategy; collaborative, small-group practice; and independent practice.

Massachusetts Department of Education. ***Agency and Partnership Based Orientation Program for Workplace Educators*** (1993a); ***Workplace Education Mentoring Pilot Project Final Report*** (1993b) (ED 363 740); and ***Workplace Education Mini Course Pilot Project Final Report*** (1993c) (ED 363 739). Malden: Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative, MDE, 1993.

These three reports document staff development efforts that are being conducted by the Massachusetts Workplace Education Initiative. The mentoring pilot project matched experienced with less experienced workplace educators and the minicourse model was used to train new workplace educators. The agency and partnership orientation program was used at Quinsigamond Community College for pre- and in-service training. All three programs can be replicated.

Mrowicki, L., and Conrath, J. ***Evaluation Guide for Workplace Basic Skills Programs***. Des Plaines, IL: Workplace Education Division, The Center—Resources for Education, 1994. (ED 373 261)

Written from the perspective of basic skills providers, this guide provides information about evaluating functional context, basic skills programs in manufacturing. Includes an overview of issues and many examples of actual instruments.

Perin, D. "Adult Students Help Shape Their Own Education: Active Learner Participation in a Workplace Basic Education Program." ***Adult Basic Education*** 4, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 94-104.

Describes the ways that health care workers shaped their workplace basic education program.

Sperazi, L., and Jurmo, P. ***Team Evaluation: A Guide for Workplace Education Programs***. East Brunswick, NJ: Literacy Partnerships, 1994. (ED 372 284).

Funded by the National Institute for Literacy, this guide describes a collaborative approach to evaluation of a workplace basic skills programs that can be carried out as part of normal program operations.

Sticht, T. G. ***The Military Experience and Workplace Literacy: A Review and Synthesis for Policy and Practice***. Philadelphia, PA: National Center on Adult Literacy, 1995.

Reviews and synthesizes the results of the extensive research and development on workplace literacy that has been accomplished by the U.S. military. Among major findings are the following: there is no one best way for identifying the literacy demands of jobs, and workplace literacy programs can produce significant improvements in job-related reading in fairly brief periods of time.

Vann, B. A., and Hinton, B. V. "Workplace Social Networks and Their Relationship to Student Retention in On-Site GED Programs." ***Human Resource Development Quarterly*** 5, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 141-151.

Reports on the results of a research study that examined workplace socialization factors that affected whether 151 former students became program finishers or dropouts. Suggests that on-site program planners should address the social environment of the workplace.

Waugh, S. ***An Organizational Approach to Workplace Basic Skills. A Guidebook for Literacy Practitioners***. Ottawa, Ontario: Ottawa Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association, 1992.

Developed to assist deliverers of community-based programs to workplace initiatives, this guidebook takes into consideration geographical, cultural and organizational differences. Supports a high-skill approach to workplace education.

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CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210